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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001765

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 25X1-HUMAN
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [WI](#)
SUBJECT: LUGAR VISIT AFTERMATH

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman; reasons 1.4 (B)(D)

11. (C) Despite some scattered grumbling in the media and elsewhere about U.S. "pressure" and unaddressed humanitarian concerns vis-a-vis the Sahrawis, press coverage of Senator Lugar's humanitarian mission and the unconditional release of all remaining Moroccan prisoners by the Polisario has been positive overall. The Sahrawi and Polisario officials we encountered were also generally quite positive, many of them noting that the unseasonal desert rainstorm the day before was an auspicious omen on the occasion of the POW release. The government, despite its feeling let down by aspects of our public reaction to the release, has bitten its tongue, welcomed what it predictably portrayed as an entirely Polisario decision, and, as it promised it would, publicly presented the humanitarian release as an opportunity to create a more positive dynamic in the region.

GOA CLARIFIES IT IS NOT A PARTY TO THE DISPUTE BUT CAN PLAY GOOD OFFICES ROLE

12. (U) Minister of State Belkhadem, who also serves as President Bouteflika's Personal Representative, also issued a clarifying statement August 19 in response to Senator Lugar's remarks in Morocco suggesting that Algeria and Morocco were the negotiating parties in the Western Sahara dispute. As reported in El Khabar August 20, Belkhadem explained that Algeria can play a part in the settlement of the conflict, but only to the extent of playing a good offices role, helping to bring the viewpoints of the two parties to the dispute, Morocco and the Polisario, closer together on the issue of implementing international legality and UN resolutions.

MFA STATEMENT HOPES RELEASE WILL MARK BEGINNING OF A POSITIVE DYNAMIC

13. (U) In an August 18 statement released by the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Algeria welcomed the release of the prisoners by the Polisario to President Bush's envoy, Senator Lugar, praising the release as an important humanitarian action that demonstrated Polisario's responsible behavior and good will. "With this welcome development, the Polisario Front has liberated all the prisoners of war, thus enabling a sensitive page in the fratricidal Western Sahara conflict to be turned. Algeria hopes that all other pending humanitarian issues can be resolved rapidly, in particular the question of Sahrawi prisoners and missing persons.

14. (U) At the same time, the Ministry statement continued, Algeria hopes that today's positive development will mark the beginning of a dynamic of good neighborliness and positive interaction ("convivialite"), to the benefit of all peoples in the region. The statement went on to underscore that Algeria remained more than ever attached to international legality and wanted to see renewed UN efforts to secure full cooperation of the parties to the dispute (Morocco and the Polisario) in the context of the peace plan for self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara.

BOUTEFLIKA SENDS WARM WISHES ON KING'S BIRTHDAY AND ANNIVERSARY OF 1953 UPRIISING AGAINST COLONIAL RULE

15. (U) Separately, on the occasion of both King Mohammed VI's birthday and the anniversary of the uprising of the Moroccan king and people against French colonial rule, both of which fall on August 21, Bouteflika sent the King a warm letter of congratulations. In his message, Bouteflika conveyed "fraternal best wishes" on behalf of himself and the people and government of Algeria; praised the King's "enlightened leadership"; reaffirmed Algeria's "firm will and determination to pursue cooperation and work together for the development of special, brotherly relations between Morocco and Algeria"; and recalled their shared struggle against colonial rule, describing it as launching a new era in their relations and in the Maghreb.

POSITIVE RHETORIC BELIES CONTINUING PRIVATE ANGER

16. (C) Beneath the generally positive public rhetoric, it is clear from Bouteflika's August 18 comments to Senator Lugar

(Algiers 1753) that he is incensed over perceived Moroccan insults and policy moves, particularly Morocco's last-minute cancellation of Prime Minister Ouyahia's visit in June and what Algeria sees as a policy of "faits accomplis" regarding the Western Sahara. In this regard, Bouteflika's comment that Algeria would only improve relations with Morocco if the latter agreed to return to the UN framework (for resolving the Western Sahara issue) would appear to go beyond Algeria's standard position that bilateral relations and the Western Sahara issue are completely separate and that disagreement over the latter need not hold back the development of relations. While time will tell, the MFA spokesman's remarks, Bouteflika's birthday/anniversary message to the King, and Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir's reported appointment to Rabat as Ambassador all suggest Bouteflika's comments may have been more a venting of personal anger and frustration than a genuine shift in longstanding policy.

ABRUPT CANCELLATION OF OUYAHIA
VISIT AT HEART OF BOUTEFLIKA'S PIQUE

17. (C) The abrupt manner in which the King cancelled PM Ouyahia's visit in June (declaring the visit "inopportune" only 45 minutes after informing the Algerians that the King would meet with and host Ouyahia at lunch) is at the heart of Bouteflika's pique and offended pride because he saw it as a direct, grave, and high-level sign of disrespect both toward Algeria and to his own person as president. Previous explanations attributing the cancellation to accumulating Moroccan frustrations over Algerian "right to independence" rhetoric, or Algeria's failure to adequately respond to the King's important gesture of attending the Arab League Summit in Algeria in March, in our view have not been fully convincing because the King had agreed to receive Ouyahia DESPITE this provocative rhetoric. (The Algerians, for their part, would argue that their rhetoric was in response to mounting Moroccan statements and actions rejecting a referendum and treating Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara as a fait accompli.) So what changed in the 45-minute period?

A POSSIBLY MORE CONVINCING
EXPLANATION OF THE CANCELLATION

18. (C) Moroccan Ambassador Benryane (strictly protect) told Ambassador in early August the real reason for the abrupt cancellation was the King's anger when he received the final Algerian delegation list for the visit. According to Benryane, the King had viewed the meeting of the two prime ministers as primarily political in nature, with the object of the meeting being agreement on concrete steps that would result in a reopening of the border. He had resisted agreeing to personally receive the Algerian PM as long as it was not clear that the Algerian Foreign and Interior Ministers would be on the delegation, because he viewed their participation as evidence that the Algerians also viewed the visit in a political framework and were serious about an early reopening of the border.

19. (C) According to Benryane, when the King was presented a delegation list that included the two ministers, he immediately agreed to meet with and host PM Ouyahia and word was relayed within minutes to Algiers via the Algerian ambassador in Rabat. Shortly after the King extended the invitation, the Moroccans received the final delegation list from the Algerians. That list showed the Foreign and Interior ministers would not be on the delegation after all. The King in turn angrily concluded the Algerians were not serious and ordered the Algerians be told the time was not "opportune" for the Prime Minister's visit.

ERDMAN